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Anti-Sandinista Rebels Beg U.S. To Continue Aid

The CIA has an ugly history of inciting rebellions, then tiptoeing away. Left behind to be slaughtered are the native recruits whom the CIA has befriended, armed and trained.

This happened in 1974 to the Meo tribesmen in Laos, then in 1975 to the Kurds in Iraq, each time with tragic consequences. Now the CIA has abandoned the Indians and Creoles who had been encouraged to revolt against the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua.

The leaders of the betrayed guerrillas flew to Washington a few days ago to appeal to higher authority. "Don't turn your back on us," pleaded the anguished Creole leader, Teofilo Archibald, at a meeting on Capitol Hill. "My people are suffering real bad, and you sit back and do nothing."

The words choked in his throat. "You give me candy," he added huskily, "and then haul back the next piece." No longer able to hold back his emotion, he sobbed.

The Indian leader, Steadman Fagoth, had betrayed his own seething anger to me in private. But he kept it under control at appointments my office arranged for him in Washington. He spoke calmly, factually, almost with an air of resignation.

The supplies the CIA had given him would soon run out, he said. Then it would be only a matter of time before the Sandinistas counterattacked. "If there's going to be any holocaust in Central America," he added wearily, "at least I'll be a witness."

The two guerrilla chiefs have now returned to the steaming jungles and swamps their people occupy along the east coast of Nicaragua. They will wait sullenly for the Sandinistas to herd their people into "relocation camps"—the communist term, says Fagoth, for concentration camps. They will resist with knives after the CIA's bullets run out. Then they will probably die, as did hundreds of thousands of Meos and Kurds before them.

At first, the Indians and Creoles fought side by side with the Sandinistas to oust the hated dictator, Anastasio Somoza. But after the revolution, the Sandinistas decided that the natives' communal way of life would make excellent socialist demonstration projects.

Those who resisted this oppressive communist encroachment got harsh treatment. Both Archibald and Fagoth were imprisoned and tortured. Archibald showed the scars where his fingernails had been pulled out. Fagoth went through the standard, communist-style psychological torture—loss of sleep, erratic schedule, intensive interrogation, dehumanizing treatment.

The fiery Fagoth heads a coalition of Miskito, Suma and Rama Indians called the Misura group. My roving reporter, Jon Lee Anderson, is traveling with them inside Nicaragua. He reports that they are desperately short of food, medicine and ammunition.

Fagoth showed up in my office with a message from my reporter and an appeal for help. He was especially eager to meet the critics of U.S. intervention in Nicaragua and tell them what was happening to his people. I tried to arrange appointments for him to talk to Sens. Joseph R. Biden (D-Del.), Christopher J. Dodd (D-Conn.) and Patrick J. Leahy (D-Vt.). On the eve of the Fourth of July adjournment, none of them could find the time.

But Fagoth met with other senators and aides. He also briefed staff members of the Senate intelligence committee. He said his guerrillas must make a living for their families, so they rotate through his command. The CIA gave them enough arms to fight but never enough to win. Now the CIA has cut off supplies to his forces.

The issue is not whether the CIA should have armed the Misura and promoted an insurrection in Nicaragua. That decision was made 18 months ago. The issue is whether the CIA should now abandon its surrogates to a relentless enemy.

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